

OPENING DIGITAL DOORS: REMOVING BARRIERS TO CAREER GUIDANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND



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EXPLORES
HOW DIGITAL
ACCESSIBILITY
CAN TRANSFORM
ACCESS TO
CAREERS ADVICE
AND SUPPORT
FOR LEARNERS
WITH SEND**

Digital accessibility means making sure everyone can use and benefit from digital tools and information – regardless of disability or neurodiversity. In the world of career guidance, it is about removing barriers so that all young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), can explore options, connect with professionals and access resources in a way that works for them.

As more guidance services move online – whether that’s through virtual careers events, online application systems, or digital information packs – there’s a risk that some young people are left behind. But with a few simple changes, we can open up digital spaces and ensure that they are inclusive from the start.

Barriers young people with SEND face online

Many young people with SEND face barriers that others don’t even notice. These might include:

- Websites that don’t work with screen readers or keyboard navigation
- Online platforms that use fast-paced language, flashing visuals, or complex layouts

- PDFs and careers resources that aren’t tagged or accessible
- Webinars without captions or alternative ways to engage
- Virtual events that assume everyone is comfortable speaking or typing in front of others

If we don’t consider these things when designing our digital content and careers delivery, we unintentionally exclude people who already face additional challenges when navigating education and employment.

Where accessibility gaps often show up

Digital accessibility isn’t just about websites – it affects every part of how careers support is delivered online. Here are a few common areas to review:

1. Online careers platforms

Many young people rely on school or college portals, local authority sites or third-party platforms to explore career pathways. But not all are designed with accessibility in mind. Text can be too small, colour contrast can be poor or features might not work properly with assistive technology like screen readers or voice commands.





2. Virtual guidance sessions

Video calls and online events are now a regular part of careers work. But not all learners can access these equally. Fast-paced conversations, background noise, unclear audio, or lack of captions can create barriers – especially for deaf or neurodivergent young people.

3. E-resources (PDFs, videos, social media)

Digital resources are often shared as PDFs, videos, or graphics on social media. But if they're not made with accessibility in mind, they can be unreadable or confusing. A simple infographic with no alt text or a video with no captions can mean a young person misses key information.

Practical ways to improve inclusion

The good news? You don't need to be a tech expert to make your digital careers work more inclusive. Here are practical tips - many of which are quick, free and easy to implement:

- Use built-in accessibility tools (like in Microsoft 365). If you create documents, presentations or emails using Microsoft tools, the Accessibility Checker is your friend. It highlights problems like missing alt text, poor contrast or unreadable tables and suggests how to fix them.
- Use heading styles in Word or PowerPoint so screen readers can navigate content properly. Avoid walls of text and make sure hyperlinks describe where they lead (e.g., 'Download the careers guide' instead of 'Click here').
- Make social media more accessible

If you're sharing updates or resources on social media, a few small tweaks can make a big difference:

- Use alt text for images
 - Add captions to videos
 - Write hashtags in #CamelCase (e.g. #NationalCareersWeek)
 - Keep emojis to a minimum and avoid placing them in the middle of sentences
 - Create inclusive PDFs and documents
- PDFs are widely used but can be inaccessible if they are not created properly. Make sure your PDFs:
- Use easily readable fonts (like Arial or Calibri)
 - Have proper headings and alt text
 - Can be read using screen readers (export 'tagged' PDFs from Word)
 - Avoid clutter and use clear layouts
 - Easy Read versions and documents with simple language can also help more young people engage – especially those with learning difficulties or language barriers.

Make in-person and digital events inclusive

If you're running webinars, careers fairs, or guidance sessions – online or in-person, then consider:

- Offering live captions and British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation
- Reducing background noise and avoiding flashing visuals
- Allowing time for breaks and processing
- Asking about access needs when people sign up
- Sharing information in advance in different formats (including Easy Read or audio if needed)

Simple adjustments, like allowing (pre-prepared) questions by chat or email – instead of live voice – can give all attendees the chance to participate and contribute in a way that suits them.

Real-world example

A college careers team I worked with wanted to make their digital careers offer more accessible. They started by reviewing their PowerPoint presentations using Microsoft's Accessibility Checker and added alt text to all images. They also made sure that all future events included captions and provided alternative versions of resources in Word, PDF and Easy Read formats.

One neurodivergent student shared afterwards that this was the first time they felt confident attending a careers webinar. 'The captions helped me follow along without getting overwhelmed,' they said. 'It felt like it was for me, not just for everyone else.'

Helpful tools and resources

You don't need to start from scratch. These tools and organisations can help:

- Microsoft Accessibility Checker – built into Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Outlook
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) – a global standard for website and content accessibility
- RNIB – practical tips on accessible formats for people with visual impairments
- AbilityNet – free resources and support for digital accessibility

Conclusion: Inclusion starts with intention

Digital accessibility doesn't mean changing everything overnight – it means thinking ahead and making sure that no one is unintentionally excluded. When we design with inclusion in mind, we create digital spaces that welcome all young people, especially those with SEND.

Career guidance is about opening doors. Let's make sure those doors aren't locked to anyone because of how we've shared information or run an event.

Call to action

If you're a careers professional, educator or provider, start with one small step. Review your next document or event for accessibility. Use the built-in tools. Ask your audience what they need. Disability and Neuro-inclusion isn't about being perfect – it's about being open to change.

And if you'd like support, resources, or training to make your workspace and careers offer more inclusive, I'd love to help.

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